

horrible for a girl to give herself to a man just because he is eligible, a good match, as they say, and because she wants a husband! I made up my mind I'd die rather. If I had been wrong, I preferred to remain wrong. Some errors, I thought, are better to cling to than some truths—more esthetic and—proper."

Frances pursed her lips in perplexity; but she remained silent.

"Oh, Frances," went on Molly, "that was a period of such bitter disappointment! All the holiness, all the idealism, of loving and marrying snatched from a girl by women who had lost their own—if they ever had any!"

"I wanted to write to you to ask you how you had found things; but just then I didn't know where to address you. I wondered if you had fallen to earth in the same way."

"Then, at Lenox, I met Mrs. Cole. That settled it. The others were all wrong. Her ideals had all come true, and had remained true. The glamour of love was upon her like a halo even after twenty years. Her husband was still her lover, and she was still his sweetheart. To see her put a flower in his buttonhole was like watching a girl with her first beau."

"But Molly!" Frances broke forth, unable to restrain herself any longer. "You talk of ideals, and—here you are—"

"Please wait," begged Molly. "And you'll help me to choose—won't you?"

Frances stiffened. Molly's lips quivered for a moment; then she went on.

"After that I was happier. What if he didn't come? I shouldn't be the first to die an old maid. You see, it made the world seem brighter and better, and womanhood nobler."

Frances' eyes narrowed to mere slits, and her brow crinkled.

"And then—and then—" faltered Molly.

"Oh, will someone play soft music?" cried Frances. "The hero cometh! Rush along, so I can tell which of us is crazy."

"Yes, he came," admitted Molly, and there came into her eyes a soulful, wistful look that Frances could not fail to understand.

"Why, Mollie!" she exclaimed. "You love him! Why—"

WAIT! I'll tell you everything," broke in Molly. "As I said, he came. And—oh, Frances, it makes you feel so funny at first! To think that out of all the world the one man you could care for wants you for his very own! It makes you feel queer. No matter how greatly you have wanted him to come, there is a little feeling of resentment at his—at his wanting you. You have to get used to the idea that he has really come, and that it is right, before you get over blushing incessantly every time you think of—of—him. I think it must be so with all nice girls. No wonder it has been called a delicious madness! Then there is your sense of power. Imagine having power over the man you regard as the most wonderful of men! Men do the big things in the world, Frances, and yet to think of a girl having such power! You feel the responsibility of it. It would be awful if you weren't sure you were going to use your power for his happiness."

Frances' lips moved in silent response an ironical thought.

"For over a month he kept coming because he told me," continued Molly. "Of course we knew his people and all that, all about him."

Molly rose and took the silver-framed photograph from the bureau. Putting it in Frances' hand, she again dropped to the floor. She looked enthusiastically up at Frances' face.

"Isn't he great? That is his picture as he looked the night he told me. If I hadn't known it for a month!"

Frances looked at the picture, wholehearted approval of the man shone in her eyes; but the look of deep perplexity never left her face. She turned questioning eyes upon Molly.

"How you enthuse!" pouted Molly.

"He is lovely, Dear," said Frances. But remember, I—I don't understand."

"Well, you see, from the very first I

knew he was the one. And when a girl gets that in her mind there—there comes a sense of unity that—that—oh, Frances, it was heaven! I am afraid that I wasn't so—so—but it seemed so all right, so just as it ought to be! I just couldn't pretend not wanting him to kiss me! Every time he left me I made up my mind not to let him the next time; but I—I just couldn't! And he was so—so—you'd think he was kissing a saint or a statue."

"Not that he is cold, Frances,—he is as ardent as fire, I know,—but men like him reverence the girl they want to marry. It's wonderful to have them feel that way toward you: only at times you want to be just grabbed and crushed until it hurts."

Molly's earnestness brought the ghost of a smile to Frances' lips. "What were you joking so for, Dear?" she asked hopefully. "Surely there can't be two like this!"

"Let me tell you. It was all so wonderful! And how we planned! We walked straight through the next fifty years and arranged everything to suit us. And, Frances, that was a big order."

"Six months of such bliss no girl ever enjoyed. He did everything to make me happy. He was thoughtful of me every moment, and I was never forgetful of him. Such flowers he sent! And such everything! We went everywhere. I scorned chaperons: we were so sure of each other."

Molly paused for a moment, and her expression changed from fervid to her inimitable pout. "Then—then he went away." She averted her face now.

Frances winced. "Why, Molly!" she cried breathlessly. "This is—"

"I haven't seen his face since," interrupted Molly. She buried her own face in Frances' lap.

FRANCES remained silent. She looked toward the wedding gown, thought of the wedding arrangements, and wondered at it all. Molly raised her head.

"He was to be away for three months," she said. "It was business; so I made up my mind to endure it. He wrote regularly; but," Molly rose abruptly and brought the bronze-framed photograph from the bureau, "but one evening he came."

Frances winced again as she took the picture. "He is handsome, Molly," she said; "but it is all so—so unlike you!"

Molly covered her face with her hands and turned away for a moment. When she again faced Frances not an emotion showed.

"It was about dusk," she murmured. "He came up to me in the garden and spoke to me. I didn't know who he was, and told him so. Then, before I knew what was going to happen, he had me in his arms. I screamed; but he stifled my scream with a kiss. Then, when our eyes met, I knew instantly that I loved him. And I felt that I'd never miss the other. But—but now I'm not so sure."

Frances' mouth was severe. She shook her head expressively.

"That was three months ago," continued Molly. "And it has been three months of heaven, just like the other nine. But as the day approaches—"

"Molly Canfield," said Frances, slowly and incisively, "I—am—surprised. I thought surely that you of all girls—Why, you can't love them both!"

"I do," protested Molly. "Hour after hour I have sat here trying to decide between them, and kissing them both."

"You?" It was a scornful screech. "I can't help it. They are both so—so—"

"But you little— Why one of them has deserted you!"

"I have heard from him regularly."

"While engaged to the other?"

"Yes."

"I'll see your mother."

"Mother knows. She has tried to help me; but it is so hard to choose. They are both so lovely. Won't you try?"

Frances studied the pictures for a moment. "It would be a pretty hard choice, even if I consented to make it,"



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